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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MUSTAFA

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SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ELECTIONS SITREP
#4: JANUARY 9, 2006: CEC OFFICIALS RECEIVE CONFLICTING
MESSAGES ON ELECTION DAY SECURITY

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Central Elections Commission (CEC) officials January 9 reported to the Consul General that the Ministry of Interior (MOI) has provided conflicting messages on its ability to provide Election Day security. The MOI has agreed to abide by CEC procedures for early voting for the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF). Al-Aqsa militants in the West Bank city of Jenin have warned international observers to leave the city. European Union observers have remained, but are restricting their activity. Palestinian media reports indicated that Israel would allow Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) candidates, with the exception of Hamas and other militant groups, to campaign in East Jerusalem. End summary.

CEC Chairman Hanna Nasir:
"It's Abu Mazen's Call"

12. (C) In a January 9 discussion with the Consul General, CEC Chairman Dr. Hanna Nasir said the CEC was receiving conflicting messages from the PA. On the one hand, the Minister of Interior informed PA President Abbas (Abu Mazen) and Prime Minister Quraya' (Abu Ala'a) that the MOI cannot provide security for the election. On the other, MOI officials have told the CEC they developed an elections security plan. Despite these conflicting messages, Nasir said the CEC would continue to plan for elections as scheduled on January 25. Any delay would require a decision by Abu Mazen. Nasir also expressed to the Consul General his concerns that time was running out on arranging voting modalities for East Jerusalem. He said that the officials from the CEC Jerusalem district office would meet with Israeli officials on January 9. (Note: The meeting was reportedly to work out arrangements for campaign activities in East Jerusalem. End note.)

MOI Agrees to
CEC Voting Procedures

13. (C) Regarding voting arrangements for PA Security Forces (PASF), Nasir said that the MOI has agreed to CEC procedures for the PASF and that its forces would comply "in a fairly acceptable way." Despite these assurances, Nasir expressed lingering concerns over how the vote will proceed for the PASF commencing January 22.

Fatah/PA Still
Unsure About Elections

¶4. (C) In the meeting with the Consul General, CEC Chief Electoral Officer Ammar Dweik said that holding elections on January 25 appeared riskier than implementing a delay. Nasir said the root of the PA's security problems was meshed in domestic Palestinian politics. The Fatah leadership had yet to agree on the desirability of holding elections. Nasir opined that the Fatah leadership would need to publicly rally behind idea of elections if they are to occur as scheduled.

Al-Aqsa Warns International
Monitors to Leave Jenin

¶5. (C) Jenin-based al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades leader Zakaria Zubaydah issued a statement over the weekend demanding that international election observers leave Jenin immediately on January 7, stating that elections will not be held in Jenin until the IDF withdraws from the municipality and an agreement is reached regarding Jerusalem's participation in the PLC elections. A mid-level contact at the PA Ministry of Interior told ConGen Poloff during a January 9 telecon that al-Aqsa militants were looking for a way to use the presence of the election monitors to pressure the PASF into giving them jobs. The gunmen were also worried about Fatah's prospects vis--vis Hamas in Jenin. CEC officials reported that the Jenin district office would remain open, but at a heightened state of alert. EU election monitors in Jenin are also operating under tighter security precautions.

Summary of Local
Press Coverage

¶6. (SBU) The Palestinian dailies January 9 ran front-page

reports that Israel would allow PLC candidates to campaign in East Jerusalem. Fatah PLC candidate Hatem 'Abd al-Qader reported that the Israeli Police informed him that candidates from Jerusalem were authorized to campaign in the city commencing January 9.

-- Al-Ayyam quoted a senior PASF commander in the Jenin area who issued a warning for those considering attacks against international election observers. The commander urged international observers not to leave the Jenin area, adding that the PA was determined to safeguard their presence.

-- Ma'an News Agency quoted the General Secretary of the Palestinian Popular Committees, Azmi Shioki, who called on PLC candidates to "think about impoverished families" as they spend money on their election campaigns.

Op-eds:

-- 'Abd al-Rahman Abu Arafah, head of the Arab Thought Forum, wrote January 9 in al-Quds that the January 25 date for PLC elections must be upheld, adding that there should be a unified national Palestinian position that would leave no doubt as to when the legislative elections should be held.

-- Al-Ayyam columnist Hasan al-Batal criticized Hamas for its "contradictory positions," the first concerning its "hard-line" stance about negotiating with Israel, and the other related to its "practical" position related to the issue of voting in Jerusalem.

-- Al-Quds ran a political cartoon January 9 depicting a candidate trying to give money to potential voters as he says, "It is not a bribe; just consider it an Eid gift."

January 7-8 Summary
of Local Press Coverage

¶7. (SBU) The Palestinian dailies led with reports that six

national lists, including Fatah, Reform and Change (Hamas), Salam Fayyad's "Third Way," Mustafa Barghouthi's "Independent Palestine," the Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa (PFLP), and "The Alternative" (DFLP, PPP, FIDA, and independents) have called for an immediate meeting with Abu Mazen to reach to a "strict, clear and unified" decision concerning the holding of the forthcoming elections.

-- Al-Ayyam and al-Hayat al-Jadida highlighted reports that Israel continued its "oppressive practices" against parliamentary candidates in Jerusalem.

-- Al-Quds and al-Hayat al-Jadida ran front-page reports that the European Union demanded that Israel come to a decision regarding voting in East Jerusalem. Al-Hayat al-Jadida cited an AFP report that quoted a spokesperson for the European Observers Mission stating that it was imperative that a final decision on the elections be taken by Israel.

-- Al-Quds and al-Ayyam carried reports that the National Democratic Institute and the Carter Center suggested three alternatives for voting in East Jerusalem, including balloting in mobile convoys.

WALLES